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Information and Mind Control in China Today:

Approaches and Effects

1. Institutionalized Information and Mind Control in China

As part of China's political institutions, information and mind control has been conducted for more than half century since Chinese Communist Party took power in 1949. While the information control means, through personnel control of editors and reporters, all media in China, including newspapers, periodicals, news agencies, TV stations, broadcasting, even movie industry and art performance, are functionally categorized and managed as "mouth piece" of CCP, the mind control includes indoctrination from kindergarten to college through officially compiled textbooks, as all teachers are categorized as "educators of CCP". Therefore, it is not simply motives of some officials but the system itself that imposes and enforces information and mind control. Headquarter of the information and mind control is Central Department of Propaganda of CCP. It sets up rules, policies and arranges officials to positions as directors of key media. In each administrative level, from provincial to county, there is such a department to carry out the job in its own area. Economic reform and "Opening Policy" from 1979 have never shaken or changed mechanism of the control. In 1980s when CCP had confidence with its success and trust of people, it somehow released the control a little bit but had never tried to remove the whole control system. Mao Zedong had a very famous instruction about the system: It's vital as control of army for safety of the communist rule. After Tiananmen massacre the regime tightened the control. In recent years the control has been further reinforced for fear of losing power.

Following reasons can explain why the regime has such a fear. First, China has now entered into a stage with higher and higher social tension, because of rampant corruption of officials and harder living condition of majority of population. Chinese people have paid high costs for economic development of recent decades. In the past ten years, 60 million peasants lost their

land for living and 3.8 million urban dwellers lost their houses in process of real estate development and construction of infrastructure projects. Social protests take place in most provinces and amount of the protests in the past three years has reached 80,000 each year. In such circumstances Chinese government sees any criticism or negative news report as threat to its rule, and has tried every method to block dissemination of such information, in order to prevent societal collective action. Second, by its nature, information control is a crucial component of communist rule. As values and practices of the regime are largely different with universal values of international society, Chinese regime relies upon the information and mind control to mislead Chinese population from values of human rights and democracy, and from truth as well. Through the information and mind control, the regime pursues a formation of value system in Chinese society against democracy.

If one asks: What is the information that Chinese regime doesn't want public to know? Standards may vary upon political calculation, while the calculation is made according to its need to maintain political stability and trust of population to the government. For example, since last year severe environmental pollution has been observed more and more frequently and in many places people began to organize massive activities to defend local environment, news reports about environmental pollution have been restricted. Last month, World Bank prepared a report about China's environmental problems, which mentioned that each year 750 thousands of Chinese died of air pollution. Chinese government then forced World Bank to delete the figure with an excuse that it may lead riots in China. News reports about poisoned or bad quality food were not banned in China before. However, as recently media in the U.S., EU and other countries reported the food problem, and China's reputation and export may thus be damaged, the issue of food safety has now become politically sensitive.

In this July, Beijing TV Station reported a case that a fast food producer in Beijing used recycled cardboard, together with some meat, to make steamed bun. The news was reported by Tokyo TV Station, and then a Japanese Congressman expressed worries that Japanese sportsmen may have food safety problem during the Olympic 2008. Chinese government perceived the news utilized by "international anti-Chinese forces", so declared that the news of Beijing TV Station reported is false news and punished three directors of the TV Station. Moreover, China's National Press Bureau then gives instructions to all media that they should report positive sides of food quality of China.

2. Chinese People's Perception of the US and how it is Controlled?

First of all, Chinese people are allowed to know what "mouth piece" of CCP tells about the US. The Central Dept. of Propaganda has set up a rule (in its term, it's called "discipline for propaganda") that all media can not report international news by themselves; they can only reprint what official Xinhua News Agency writes about events outside China. Living in a society

with full of indoctrination and manipulated news reports, Chinese people's perception of the US is a strange mixture. In past years a lot of public opinion polls in China indicate that, among countries in the world, the U.S. is a country 80% of Chinese dislike it; however, the U.S. is also a country 70% of Chinese people wants to go the most.

Why is the perception so strange? From the officially controlled information Chinese people are indoctrinated the following: the US was historically a key enemy of China; it not only invaded China, but also supported KMT (CCP's enemy); in nowadays the US intervenes domestic affairs of many countries, restrains China with excuses of human rights, supports forces pursuing independence of Taiwan and Tibet thus makes unification of China in trouble; the US, as a hegemony in the world, is afraid of a stronger China, therefore carries out a policy of "containment" against China; the U.S. is the largest energy consumption country in the world, in order to get energy resources it tries to control other countries by imposing its own values. Such indoctrination contains some messages that the U.S. is the strongest country in the world and American people live much better than people of most countries. The messages, together with private information people brought from the U.S., impress many Chinese as well.

3. Regional Variations in Media Control

Generally speaking, media control in big cities and coastal areas are more flexible, particularly in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. As capital, embassies are located in Beijing, international media send their reporters to the city as well, many universities and research institutes are also located in Beijing. People in Beijing may have more opportunities to get access to nonofficial information. People in Shanghai also have more opportunities to meet with foreign businessmen than people in other cities. Guangzhou and Shenzhen are both close to Hong Kong, and have a lot of contact with people in Hong Kong. Therefore, local media in the cities have to be more open-minded. And exactly for this reason, newspapers from the cities are often the bestsellers in other provinces.

In hinterland provinces, however, media control is obviously much more tightened. For example, in Gansu, Henan and Xinjiang, individuals who criticized local governments could be charged by crimes of "endanger state security" or "overthrow regime". In some provinces people even got arrested because they listened to broadcasting programs of VOA or RFA, whereas government of Shanghai and Beijing may not do that. In Guangzhou and Shenzhen, many people collect publications from Hong Kong and usually won't get in trouble for that; but in Hunan Province near Guangzhou, recently there is a case that a person was put in jail in a charge of "collecting antirevolutionary publications".

4. Approaches and Effects of Controlling People's Perception of History, Current Affairs and National Identity

Such control mainly involves in interpretation of history and China's international relations.

History education, particularly the education of modern Chinese history, is related to rise and success of CCP and its legitimacy. In order to justify its rule, Chinese government makes every effort to smear images of its political rival, KMT, and the U.S. which once backed up KMT. On the other hand, the government hides a series of mistakes, crimes and failures under its rule, such as "Anti-Rightists Campaign", "Great Leap Forward Campaign" and the great famine caused death of more than 30 million peasants, "Great Cultural Revolution" and Tiananmen massacre, etc. In China's textbooks of contemporary history, these events are either ignored or misinterpreted. Now publication of books on the events is still banned. Last year is the 40 anniversary of "Great Cultural Revolution" and this year is 50 anniversary of "Anti-Rightists Campaign", scholars in China are not allowed to organize any academic meeting to discuss the event. When some of them tried to come to the U.S. to attend conferences about the topics held here, they were warned or threatened by state security police. As a result, many Chinese people who personally experienced the events now still don't know much about key facts of the events, and younger generations often don't know the events at all. Indoctrinated by the regime, some young people now even praise "Great Cultural Revolution" and perceive Mao Zedong era as an ideal historical period.

Indoctrination about China's international relations focuses on "peaceful rise of China", its success in gaining respect and support from various countries, and failure of US policies against China. News reports from official Xinhua News Agency carefully select materials favoring China but ignore all the bad news the government dislikes. For example, in recent years China's media repeatedly reports successful development of friendship and trust with Russia and African countries, but when Russia implements policies against Chinese immigrants or people of Saint Petersburg opposed to a plan to build a new China town in the city, such news are purposely excluded. The same situation could be found in China's news reporting about Sino-African relationship. For Chinese audience if they simply watch TV news and read newspapers, all the news how African people perceive China as a neocolonialism today and how Chinese government "buy" votes from African governments in UN organizations to defend its human rights record don't exist at all. Talking about relations between China and developing countries, Chinese people don't know either how revolution was exported to developing countries and "armed struggle" in the countries trained from Beijing during Mao era, or how Khmer Rouge was trained and supported by CCP and why many overseas Chinese escaped from Cambodia hate the Red China.

Some independent intellectuals try various ways to get information from outside but most Chinese people either are not capable to do so or lack enthusiasm to explore truth at possible

costs of political risks. I personally know a Chinese intellectual who received his MBA in China and often thinks about political and social issues. Only after he went to London School of Economics and Political Science for his Ph.D. program and heard directly from his African classmates about criticism of China's neocolonialism, did he realize that his perception about Sino-African good relations formed in China was based upon incomplete information and thus not really correct.

As a conclusion, I would like to indicate that two key principles the Central Dept. of Propaganda employs for media control are as following: "to play the role of mouth piece of CCP" and "to direct public toward the needs of CCP". The first principle suggests that media workers in China don't have to have their mind; they should simply follow instructions of the party and speak what is taught and told. The second principle implies that function of media in China is to help the party direct public for the needs of CCP; in other words, people's needs are not counted, and media, if it wants to survive in China, should work only for the party even though such work could hurt interest of people. If one could understand the principles, he will find it not so difficult to interpret why some news made in China and some are covered, and why Chinese people's perception about the world is somehow different from that of democratic societies